



40 Clifford Street, Hartford, CT 06114 * Ph: 860-692-3066 * ccjf.org

Written Testimony Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee in opposition to H.B. 5297: An Act Concerning the Multiplicity of Affecting Facilities in Certain Census Block Groups in the State.

March 14, 2022

To the Honorable Co-Chairs Senator Cohen and Representative Gresko, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee:

We are writing from the Collaborative Center for Justice, a Hartford-based social justice advocacy organization primarily sponsored by six communities of Catholic women religious across Connecticut. Our mission includes working for systemic change and advocating for policies that improve the lives of low-income and other marginalized people.

We write in opposition to H.B. 5297: An Act Concerning the Multiplicity of Affecting Facilities in Certain Census Block Groups in the State. We appreciate the acknowledgement that action needs to be taken to protect environmental justice communities from continuing to be saddled with the environmental and health impacts of polluting facilities. We also appreciate the recognition that more needs to be done to promote environmental justice in Connecticut. However, we do not believe that this bill will accomplish what really needs to be done to protect overburdened communities from the impacts of additional polluting facilities.

The bill seeks to include the input from members of the Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council (CEEJAC), and we agree that voices from environmental justice communities need to be included in the discussion about what legislative protections need to be put in place to protect overburdened communities. We are concerned that the Commissioner's ownership of the report undermines the authority of community voices.

As people of faith, we are concerned about the climate crisis and environmental justice, as so many people are. Low-income communities and communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by air pollution and the effects of climate change. Efforts to address these issues should be focused first in the communities that have been most impacted, and people in these communities should have a meaningful seat at the table throughout the process where their voices and expertise are valued.

We are also urgently concerned about the health, safety, and wellbeing of all people, and particularly low-income and vulnerable people. Continuing to site polluting facilities in communities already burdened by other major sources of pollution such as fossil fuel infrastructure, incinerators, and waste facilities, is harmful and immoral. It is unjust that some communities, usually low-income communities and communities of color, have to continue to be

the dumping grounds for pollution and environmental degradation. We believe that every person has the right to live a life of dignity, and continual siting of polluting facilities in environmental justice communities is a barrier to the protection of that right.

We appreciate the desire by the Committee and other legislators to address the critical issue of environmental injustices experienced by overburdened communities around the state. To do that in an effective way, we would suggest that an environmental justice bill include:

- Language that would require DEEP to deny any permit for an affecting facility that would add to the cumulative environmental or public health burden of the particular community in which the facility would be sited;
- Applying the environmental justice law to modified permits and renewal of permits, as well as new permits;
- Strengthening of public notification processes and public comment opportunities in the communities closest to the proposed facility;
- Provisions that would strengthen DEEP's capacity to enforce existing, and future updates to, the state's environmental justice law;
- We also advocate that the process include, and be driven by, people living in environmental justice communities and working with environmental justice communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Dwayne David Paul – Director

Rachel Lea Scott, MSW – Associate Director